

LCDR [REDACTED]

Below is a summary of interview of LCDR [REDACTED] USCG, conducted by the AIM informal board on August 25, 2006 concerning the diving incident which resulted in two deaths on August 17, 2006. AIM board members present at the interview were Captain [REDACTED], LCDR [REDACTED], and LCDR [REDACTED].

LCDR [REDACTED] reported aboard CGC HEALY on 18 May 2005, roughly fifteen months ago. He currently serves as Operations Officer (OPS), with oversight over six divisions – Navigation, Science, Communications, Medical, Administration and Deck. The dive officer (LT HILL) was dual hated as the Marine Science Officer (MSO) and reported to OPS in both capacities.

LCDR [REDACTED] is a 1993 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy. He served aboard a WMEC, a navy destroyer, and commanded a WPB. Ashore, he served as junior liaison to ATG PAC, and on the staff at D11(ole). He completed HEALY's entire 2005 deployment, and has been aboard for all of the current deployment.

On 17 August, he began his day at around 0305 when he got a call about flight operations. He had planned to attend a flight brief at 0400, but slightly overslept and got to the bridge at approximately 0415. Flight ops were running 24/7 aboard HEALY at the time with a port and starboard rotation. Modified flight briefs are typically attended by the CO, HCO, LSO, pilot, passengers and OPS. The XO and EO are excused from modified briefs. During flight briefs the Helicopter Control Officer (HCO) briefs the operation, including communications, flight plan, science operations, weather and safety. The flight operations commenced as scheduled and ran off and on from 0430 to 1430/1500ish. Sometime during that period LCDR [REDACTED] remembers the CO mentioning the possibility of ice liberty.

Following flight operations, LCDR [REDACTED] started looking for potential places to hove-to in the ice for ice liberty. LT HILL (Dive Officer) approached him and asked about conducting a dive operation. This had been a recurring theme, as LT HILL had been showing a great desire to conduct dive ops for a couple of weeks. LCDR [REDACTED] mentioned to her that she should put her plan together.

Later in the day, at the conclusion of science ops, they found a place to hove-to and began the process of setting up for ice liberty. The brow was rigged, cones were set out to mark the ice, and a bear watch was designated. Following some preparation time, LCDR [REDACTED] found a dive plan from LT HILL on his stateroom rack. He reviewed the plan and made a pen and ink change– that the dive team may deploy via the brow to the ice. He then walked it over to XO. When he routed the plan up the chain the XO asked him if “there was anything interesting in here,” to which he replied “no, nothing out of the ordinary.” The XO instructed him to route it up. He placed the plan in the cabin.

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About 30 minutes later, the CO passed verbally to LCDR [REDACTED] that the dive plan was signed and in LT Hill's inbox. LCDR [REDACTED] called LT HILL to inform her of the signed plan – she was already in the dive locker getting ready. LT HILL asked if a verbal brief would be required prior to the dive operation. LCDR [REDACTED] told her that no brief would be required – he viewed this as a routine operation with minimal risk.

The CO did ask a few questions about the dive, that LCDR [REDACTED] passed to LT HILL. Specifically he asked if all three divers could be in the water at the same time, per the regulations? LT HILL said "yes." LCDR [REDACTED] told LT HILL he wasn't 100% sure, but that he'd take the dive officers word for it. LT HILL said she'd brief the CO.

LCDR [REDACTED] went to the bridge. After a while he noticed that he still hadn't seen the dive team. Though, he realized it would take some additional time to get all their gear down the brow. At 1705 he went to the mess deck. He ate dinner with MCPO [REDACTED], who said he would not be going out on ice liberty.

LCDR [REDACTED] finished his dinner at about 1730 or so, changed and got out to the ice at about 1745. He stopped by the focsle on the way to check out dive ops, and saw quite a bit of activity. Once on the ice he went out about one hundred feet from the ship and hung out there for 30-45 minutes. During that time he watched the festivities and consumed two and a half beers.

A while later, he heard the pipe that liberty would expire in 10 minutes, and he began to work his way back to the ship. As he walked back the hundred or so feet he saw quite a bit of commotion. Along side the ship, below the port anchor, he noticed that several people were engaged in a polar bear swim. LCDR [REDACTED] immediately thought, "The XO won't be happy about this." He was going to inquire when he was standing next to the SUPPO who said the CO is right over there. At that point he naturally assumed it was ok.

LCDR [REDACTED] watched the polar bear swim for about 5 minutes or so, when he heard BMCS [REDACTED] yell out "divers coming to the surface." It seemed like a relatively alarmed voice, so LCDR [REDACTED] started paying attention to the dive side. He then heard someone say something to the effect of "more than 20 feet." As he walked closer more people were milling around. He looked back over to the ship and the polar bear swim was still on going. He thought he should take charge and stop the polar bear swim, but he didn't yell out for them to stop. He did not secure the polar bear swim at that point.

When he got a little closer to the dive side it became clear something was definitely wrong. He heard discussion related to "bubbles," and that the divers were not responding. He saw two limp divers pulled up on the surface and they did not seem to be conscious. He noted that BM2 DUQUE had red foam on his body. LT HILL had white foam coming from her nose and mouth. LCDR [REDACTED] immediately thought the two divers might have had an embolism.

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LCDR [REDACTED] walked next to LT HILL's head. She was getting CPR and mouth to mouth. DCI [REDACTED] stood over BM2 and said mouth to mouth was not appropriate in this circumstance, but the first responders continued absent clear medical advice. LT HILL did not appear to look as bad off as BM2 DUQUE.

Shortly thereafter, the CO showed up next to LCDR [REDACTED] and ordered him to get D17 on the phone. LCDR [REDACTED] immediately departed, and went back aboard the cutter. LCDR [REDACTED] passed ENS [REDACTED] on the ice and inquired as to his intentions. ENS [REDACTED] was reading the dive manual looking for treatment possibilities, and LCDR [REDACTED] told him to continue. LCDR [REDACTED] went back aboard looking for the CO. It was a little after 1900. He found the captain moving in the 04 deck ladder well, starboard side. The CO seemed distressed, and LCDR [REDACTED] told him "Sir, we need you, we need your leadership." The CO went below, and LCDR [REDACTED] went to radio to take charge of comms. LCDR [REDACTED] called the PACAREA command center. He recognized that the CO said D17, but knew that PACAREA had OPCON and TACON and called them first - he knows the number by heart.

At 1910 he established contact with PACAREA and explained the emergency over the phone. He also gave the position as 77N, 177W about 500nm North of Pt. Barrow, Alaska. He requested a flight surgeon, and was put in contact with Dr. [REDACTED]. He spoke briefly with the flight surgeon, who asked for two pieces of information: 1. were they breathing and 2. were there signs of respiration/pulse? He passed the information to the bridge to relay to the medical team. He never got an answer.

The phone connection was lost. He attempted several more calls, with no success. LCDR [REDACTED] eventually went from radio to a space right next to sickbay. While in sick bay, attempting to call, LCDR [REDACTED] told MCPO [REDACTED] to check on the CO. MCPO [REDACTED] said aye aye. Eventually, LCDR [REDACTED] got LTJG [REDACTED] on the line with the flight surgeon for a short time before losing the connection again. This was approximately 1947.

At 1954, LTJG [REDACTED] was put in contact with Dr. [REDACTED] again, and talked for about two minutes before the call dropped. LTJG [REDACTED] continued to monitor the medical situation while LCDR [REDACTED] tried to regain contact. At about 2001 he made contact again, and spoke to Dr. [REDACTED] who then instructed OPS to keep the crew busy. Dr. [REDACTED] then spoke to LTJG [REDACTED] and both divers were pronounced dead.

LCDR [REDACTED] then hung up with PACAREA, telling them he'd make contact again later. XO, LTJG [REDACTED], LCDR [REDACTED] and MCPO [REDACTED] made arrangements to take care of the bodies and personal effects, and make required notifications. They notified the CO.

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LCDR [REDACTED] went to the bridge, and found the CO on the starboard side of the bridge. LCDR [REDACTED] told the CO "there's nothing left we can do." The CO told LCDR [REDACTED] to muster the crew on the flight deck. LCDR [REDACTED] instructed the navigator, who was the OOD, to heave to, and send all watchstanders with the exception of the himself down below to the flight deck.

The XO assembled key personnel in the cabin to discuss a checklist of things that needed to happen. He instructed admin to check PDR's for next of kin, and insurance information. He got the message traffic drafted, and ensured all personal effects of the divers were collected and safeguarded.

In response to questions, LCDR [REDACTED] answered:

- There is no normal practice to brief dive operations aboard HEALY
- In the past, boat and dive ops were always combined so that the boat brief would cover diving and small boat ops at one time. Here, only dive ops were done, so the brief was essentially skipped.
- This was the first dive of this deployment.
- LT HILL was a graduate of Navy Dive School and had logged about 7 dives in the arctic. She did not have broad experience.
- BM2 DUQUE had no diving experience deploying from HEALY.
- ENS [REDACTED] had no diving experience deploying from HEALY.
- "I don't know the CG policy regarding three divers in the water."
- He does not know the terminology of back-up diver.
- He is not familiar with the # of divers required for a CG dive.
- The flight deck parameters are – pitch 2, roll 4.
- He was not sure if any of the divers had qualification letters from the command.
- Before this dive and before this cruise the chamber was not pulled out and no training was conducted on that piece of equipment.
- He does not know if the dive side had comms with the bridge. He knows a couple of other people on the ice had comms with the bridge.
- He did not address drinking specifically with the divers.
- LCDR [REDACTED] stated that he had 2.5 beers.
- He does not know when/where the dive team got their air. The dive compressor is OOC and tagged out.
- He stated that HEALY was 500nm from Pt. Barrow, the nearest point at which a person could be transferred to an airport to get to a medical facility.
- There is no dive evacuation plan aboard HEALY
- Normally divers used a checklist, they didn't appear to this time.
- LCDR [REDACTED] stated the screws were turning ahead at 10 RPMS and the rudder was energized.
- The sonar and suction were likely energized as nothing was modified from its running condition.

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- There was no pipe made for dive ops – normally it is piped if divers are diving on the ship. Dives were not piped last year when we deployed the divers from the LCVP.
- We discussed leaving 10 shaft turns on the screws, as an appropriate measure to keep the ship secure in its position in the ice.
- This dive operation wasn't viewed as "diving on the ship," and he stated "he didn't make that mental leap."
- During previous dive operations the HEALY was further away from the position of the dive operation.
- LCDR [REDACTED] stated that "we always do a GAR model," as it would normally be covered in the overall small boat/dive ops brief. We did not do one here.
- LCDR [REDACTED] would have placed this dive as high green/low amber, indicating he considered this to be a routine dive.
- LCDR [REDACTED] stated that the CO looked pretty shook up at the onset of the incident, but has really pulled it together since then.
- LCDR [REDACTED] said he placed a lot of trust in LT HILL, though judgment was probably her weakest attribute. A few examples:
  - She allowed a polar bear swim to take place on a boat dive in the arctic away from the cutter, without authorization last summer. It involved a new diver and a Coast Guard Academy Cadet. She then sent the command an e-mail with the picture attached. She "caught hell from the XO." He "tore into her." She seemed to recover.
  - She made a very poor shiphandling decision that resulted in a closer than necessary approach to a vessel being escorted in the ice. LCDR [REDACTED] said he counseled her about judgment and shiphandling – she was "too close and too fast."
  - She had a problem with e-mailing things to the CO or above that should have been routed to XO/OPS first. She caught the XO off guard more than once, and was counseled.
- LT HILL's judgment ability was never a lingering concern for the XO or LCDR [REDACTED]. She possessed the proper judgment abilities to perform her duties well.
- Overall, she was a decent OOD, but near the bottom of those aboard.
- This was LT Hill's first sea tour.
- She took a long time to qualify and ramp up on key issues.
- She often "needed to get her head in the game."
- She socialized on watch.
- This dive was not planned, it came up as an opportunity. They had been planning to dive at Dutch Harbor. LT HILL just wanted to dive.

LCDR [REDACTED] said he has a very big job in HEALY. He has not received any training in dive operations. He thinks that additional training regarding the dive program would be good for OPS officer's in polar breakers.

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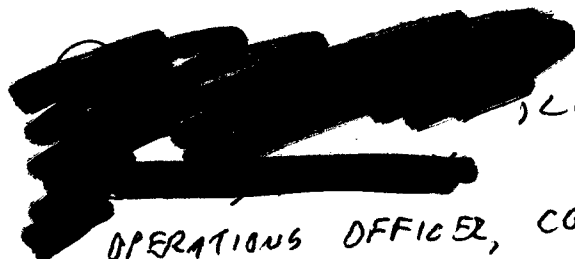
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He does not see the need for Coast Guard divers in HEALY. If the scientists need divers they can contract them out and have them sail with HEALY.

He sensed that they may have been rushing to have ice liberty. They had been talking about it for days and it felt somewhat like we were rushing.

He viewed the brow as the most serious hazard for ice liberty. It was at a 45 degree angle.

There were lots of little flags that went up. He didn't recognize them at the time. If he had maybe things would be different.

 , LCDR

OPERATIONS OFFICER, CGC HEALY

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